

The New Woman of the Orient

Slowly But Surely She is Gaining Her Rightful Place

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ON a balmy spring day it fascinates the eye to watch the foggy, murky-looking horizon slowly become iridescent with the dawn of day. The dawn of the new Oriental womanhood is no less charming. The entire Asian horizon today is roseate with the grandeur of this new being—the emancipated woman—that spells salvation and progress to the entire Orient.

The Oriental woman who, for centuries, has figured as the slave, or, at best, as the plaything of the opposite sex, is now coming to be regarded by the Asian man as "the mother of the nation," on whose intelligence, education and native genius hangs the destiny of the people. With this changed attitude has come the emancipation of woman from the harem and zenana (seclusion); and the abolition of the old regulations of enforced widowhood, early marriage and polygamy. Henceforth the Oriental woman is to be treated with respect and gallantry, given her rights as a human being, and educated so as to creditably discharge the responsibilities of her position.

It is self-interest that actuates the Asian man to curb his instinct to be the "ruler of all he surveys," and given the woman a chance to evolve. Contact with the Occidental has impressed him with the fact that, in consigning the woman to slavery, ignorance and superstition, he is weakening the nation. He is fast coming to realize that he must give the woman an equitable status—an opportunity for development, otherwise a dire fate awaits the Asian peoples. This awakening is responsible for the great activity with which the Oriental has taken up the work of emancipating woman.

Of all Oriental countries, Hindostan has given the most iniquitous treatment to its women. The woman has labored under serious sex-inequality. She has been married early, and in many cases she has been obliged to live in polygamy. Man has compelled her to remain a widow, while he has prohibited polyandry, refused to put up with enforced widowhood, and enjoyed a plurality of wives. In many Hindu families the treatment of the widow has been far from humane and considerate. The East Indian woman, as a rule, has had a mere domestic existence.

India leads the Orient.

TODAY, India beats all other Oriental countries in its activity in filing the fetters of woman. The larger cities have become vital centres for the propaganda for the uplift of the female sex, and even the provinces are eagerly initiating reforms that ten or even five years ago would have been considered revolutionary. Both the man and the woman are learning the utility of working in double harness, which they find is impossible so long as the old time encumbrances and prejudices that formed essential parts of the old system still exist. Naturally, the wife is assuming something like her normal status, and the nation is endeavoring to provide educational facilities which will enable the women of India to develop into useful citizens. Modern notions regarding woman's sphere of work and status are convulsing Indian society. New ideals are being formed, new platforms enunciated. The careful training of woman is coming to be looked upon as the most vital problem of the day, and the nation is vigorously and systematically setting to work to do its duty by the fair sex.

Under the impulse of this aggressive reform movement, the old, traditional institutions are disintegrating and crumbling to dust. The old order is changing, yielding place to new conditions. Old idols are being broken and new ideals installed in their stead. The seclusion of the purdah—the confinement of women within the four walls of the home, otherwise known as the zenana or harem—is fast coming to be consid-

ered an old-fashioned and cruel custom. The sexes are not being kept apart as rigidly as they were twenty or even ten years ago. The veil is rapidly falling into disuse and men and women alike are beginning to look upon it as a relic of barbarism. Woman is commencing to move about with more freedom, and gradually it is coming to pass that she is being looked upon as an adult, invested with same faculties, instead of being considered a half-witted child, born to drudge or to amuse man.

Men urge emancipation.

THE very men who, a generation ago built special apartments wherein the women of the household were confined, are today strongly recommending the liberation of the women; and the present generation is gradually becoming imbued with the conviction that chastity dwells outside a harem just as much as inside it. The arguments which two or three decades ago were universally urged in order to keep the women behind the purdah and in perpetual illiteracy have today lost their potency, and the conservatives of yesterday have joined the ranks of the enthusiasts of today who are working for the emancipation of the Indian woman. The change is so rapid and revolutionary in character that it forcefully impresses the mind of a traveler in India today.

As the Indian woman is coming in contact with the outside world, she is learning to realize her lacks and is filled with the desire to adjust herself to the transformed conditions. She is growing to feel that she is destined to take a leading part in the rejuvenescence of Hindostan and is eager to qualify herself to help advance the cause of her country. All over the land the women are organizing clubs, associations and societies for the purpose of mutual improvement and for the uplift of their less fortunate sisters. There is hardly a city or town of any size in the Indian peninsula which is without such organizations, and all of them significantly point to the fact that the Hindu women are slowly becoming used to banding together to advance their cause, and have learned the effectiveness of organization and mutual aid—a development hitherto unknown in the history of Hindostan.

Hindu women awake.

WHILE she was confined in seclusion and hearty intermingling of the sexes was interdicted, the woman of India spent her time between household duties and superstitious religious practices. She beguiled her mind with stories regarding the gods and goddesses. Today the Hindu woman is thinking less of the world to come and more of the present. She is beginning to grasp the idea that she must set herself to the task of lightening her household drudgery, cultivate her mind scientifically and devote all her time and energy to the improvement of herself, her immediate relations, and her neighbors. Hindu girls are taking, with avidity, to education modeled on the western plan, with a few necessary changes, and schools and colleges specially designed for the education and uplift of girls are constantly being built. Indian women have even commenced to go to men's colleges, and many have graduated from the leading universities of India during recent years. A girl headed the list of candidates for the B. A. examination at the Allahabad University in 1907, climb-



JINZO NARUSE.

President of the Japanese Woman's university—the only woman's university in the Orient.



A type of the modern educated Japanese woman—now a professor in the Japanese Woman's university.

ing over the heads of 400 others in order to reach the place of honor. A girl also headed the list of 500 candidates in the sophomore examination in the same university, while two girls were fifth and seventh on the list, respectively, in the high school examination, for which over a thousand candidates appeared.

The most typical work for the emancipation of the Hindu woman is being carried on at Poona, a leading town in the Bombay Presidency. Here Professor D. K. Kharve conducts his famous Hindu Widow's Home, and also his "Mahila Vidyalaya." These two institutions are loosening the shackles from the unfortunate women of the land and showing them how to obtain the maximum of happiness from life by usefully serving society. The aim of the Widow's Home is to educate Hindu widows along broad, national lines. The young women are taught to help themselves in all domestic matters, with a view to being useful members of an Indian home after leaving the school. The principles of the Hindu religion are taught and all religious observances are scrupulously kept. Love of finery and luxury is discouraged. Some of the widows are taught nursing, weaving, tailoring, and other trades and industries that will make them self-sup-

porting if it is necessary for them to earn their own living.

A Hindu School for Girls.

SUPPLEMENTARY to the Widow's Home is the Mahila Vidyalaya. This institution was started by Professor Kharve with a view to stemming the tide of widows by laying the axe at the foot of early marriage. The Vidyalaya is probably the first boarding school for Hindu girls established in Southern India—if not in all India. The school is intended for the education of girls of the middle class and humbler walks of life, and thus only \$1.50 to \$2.00 a month is charged for board, lodging and tuition; and in case a girl's guardian cannot afford even this small sum, no charge whatever is made. The Vidyalaya at present serves merely as a hostel, and the girls attend the local day school, receive their education along with the boys—a feature that is absolutely new in India and significant of the revolution that is taking place in the country. The basic principle of the Vidyalaya is to maintain and educate unmarried girls admitted on a distinct promise from their guardians that they will not be removed from the institution until they are 20 years of age. Thus the marriage of the girls in the Vidyalaya must be postponed, of necessity, until they are over 20 years old. The emancipation of woman is a very recent innovation in India, and is, therefore, in its extreme infant stage. Only seven out of 1,000 women in India are literate. Today there are 40,000,000 women shut up in zenanas, 25,000,000 widows, and of this number, 6,000 in Bengal alone are under 1 year of age. Moreover, the facilities for the education of girls are of the poorest nature, since fully four-fifths of the villages of Hindostan are without a school house. The problem of woman-uplift in India is a knotty one; but as the native conscience has awakened to the necessity of it, there is no doubt whatever that a decade or two will see marvelous developments.

As it is, the timid, shy Hindu girl is taking to school-going. In the united provinces of Agra and Oudh the number of girl scholars shows a significant increase of 30 per cent during the year. Five years ago there were, in the Madras Presidency, 130,432 girls at school and now there are 164,706, being an increase of 26 per cent during the quinquennium. On the 30th of March, 1907, there were 121,195 girls and women in public educational institutions in the Bengal Presidency, being one in every 33 girls of school-going age as against one in every 58 at the close of the last quinquennium.

Most probably India caught the spark of woman's uplift from Japan. A systematic propaganda to modernize woman in the Mikado's Empire was started close upon half a century ago. In